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## Iran: All Set To Dominate Middle East

By Manish Rai

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The Middle East is currently the arena for a cross-border sectarian war. The weakening or collapse of repressive regimes has unleashed a fierce war for succession between rival populations, with Shia and Sunni Arabs the main protagonists. This process is playing itself not only in Iraq and Syria but in almost all the countries of the region. The regional rivalry between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia is being intensified. The Iranians are the central pillar of the united and cohesive Shia-dominated bloc which includes the Assad regime in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and its allies, the government of Iraq and the Shia militias in that country. The Saudis are now the main force seeking to stem the Iranian advance. The anti-western Turkey-Qatar-Muslim Brotherhood alliance is also an important element on the Sunni side. But now Iran is gaining the upper hand in the Sunni-Shia rift. Iran got another victory in spreading its influence in the region. The Iranian-backed Houthi militia in Yemen has made very significant gains in recent weeks, largely ignored by the western media. With this development Iran has reached to the gates of the Sunni powerhouse of Saudi Arabia.

After Iraq and Syria the events in Yemen ought to concern the west because they demonstrate once again the skill and determination of the Iranians in the game that matters most right now in the Middle East. The Houthi militia, which has been engaged in an insurgency against the government of Yemen since 2004, launched an offensive in September. The movement's fighters advanced rapidly entered the Yemeni capital, Sana'a. The Shia militia then announced an

ultimatum to Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, giving him 10 days to form a new government that would include representation for the Houthis or face unspecified other options. Now at this point in time Iran has considerable influence on four Arab capitals i.e. Damascus, Sana'a, Baghdad, and Beirut through the government of these states or through its proxies. This ability to develop and maintain proxy political-military forces has been an asset in Iranian hands since the birth of the Islamic Republic with the Lebanese Hezbollah the first fruit of it. Teheran appears currently to be repeating this process in Iraq, where brutal Shia militias are playing an ever more important role in the fight against the Islamic State. In Yemen, a similar dynamic is emerging and Syria since long Iranian controlled militia's operating. Even United States has started believing that stable Middle East can only be achieved by having Iran on board. The United States is anxious to restore the Iraqi government's authority in oil-rich Iraq, while Iran is eager to defeat a murderously anti-Shiite militia on its western flank so by seeing a common objective for both US and Iran. Recently US President Barack Obama wrote a letter to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei in this letter president Mr. Obama talked about the expansion of the Islamic State posed a threat to both the United States and Iran and said the two countries were battling a common enemy.

Obama's most recent overture to Tehran is an indication of the administration's urgency to get the nuclear issue off the table and move on to tackling other major differences between Tehran and Washington, with the possibility of cooperation in areas of core mutual interest. US is realizing that in its campaign against Islamic State one key regional power is missing: Iran. Obama's request to Ayatollah Khamenei for closer cooperation on the fight against Islamic State is an effort to fill that strategic gap and indicates a realization that without Tehran's, help the coalition will almost certainly fail. Iran has long sought to become the undisputed leader in the region, largely through aggressive and ambitious military development. Today, however, Iran is on the offensive. It is even being courted by the Obama Administration to fight IS. As soon as Iran becomes a nuclear threshold state thanks to the agreement it is negotiating with the West, it will become the most influential and powerful country of the Middle East. A nuclear, or even near-nuclear, Iran will enable this regional hegemon to control the strategic Hormuz and Bab-el Mandeb straits. Power transfer in Middle East has never been bloodless but Iran, by contrast, has managed several relatively peaceful successions of power in the last three decades. Realists in the White House must be tempted to think that the Middle Eastern oil patch would be safer with Iran inside the US alliance system.

Moreover Tehran appears to be well on the way toward nuclear weapons capability, because of the fecklessness of Western policy. This will pave the way for a yet more aggressive Iranian push to hegemony in Yemen and beyond it throughout the Gulf, Iraq and the Levant. It's clearly visible that a new Middle East is emerging with diminished influence for the region's Sunni powers and emergence of new order dominated by Iran. Iran has made it clear to everyone that it is impossible to bypass Iran in the search for solutions to the region's myriad crises. Iran the Middle East's second-largest country by population and a major influence on the Shiite Muslim world is all set to dominate the region and to change the regional geo-political landscape.